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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Hamas Afghanistan - London
Donors' Conference Greenspan's Departure
PARIS - Tuesday, January 31, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Hamas
Afghanistan - London Donors' Conference
Greenspan's Departure

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Domestic social and economic issues dominate today's front pages and editorial commentaries: the Arcelor takeover bid by Mittal Steel, Poland's veto to a VAT of 5.5 % for construction, lower unemployment rates for 2005, PM Villepin's defense of the CPE (employment proposal for youths) at the National Assembly and Chirac's choice of May 10 as the commemorative date for the abolition of slavery are today's front page stories. In international news, Europe's conditions to Hamas make the front page of Liberation and Le Figaro and are widely reported in Le Monde. (See Part C) France Soir calls Hamas's Charter "a call to hatred" and the "worst type of extreme right rhetoric." "The extreme poverty of the Palestinians is no excuse for this type of sick talk. The excerpts we publish are terrifying," says France Soir. In Le Parisien a Political Science professor and Middle East expert, Jean-Paul Chagnollaude is interviewed: "It would be tragic if Iran were to take the place of those countries financing the Palestinian territories."

In La Croix Agnes Rotivel interviews Mouin Rabbani of the International Crisis Group, who says: "The arrival of Hamas as part of the government opens new vistas. The EU should not base its financial aid on Hamas's past identity but on its future actions."

The Afghanistan donors' conference in London under the UN auspices is written up in Le Figaro, which emphasizes the need to eradicate the poppy seed industry. (See Part C) Le Figaro interviews Afghanistan's Finance Minister who calls on the international community to remember its pledge for reconstruction. "Afghanistan must exploit its natural resources and eradicate the poppy seed industry. But we can only do this gradually: today drugs represent a budget of 3 billion dollars a year, one third of our country's economy."

Several reports anticipate on President Bush's State of the Union address. Financial La Tribune titles its article: "President Bush Puts Away His Major Economic Reforms," while Le Figaro reports: "Bush wants to bounce back, ten months before the mid-term elections." According to Philippe Gelie "the President is in an uncomfortable position to save the Senate's Republican majority." Gelie predicts that in tonight's speech Bush will continue to "defend the war and the need to protect the nation with the same determination." Francois d'Alancon in La Croix predicts that "President Bush's State of the Union address will try to energize the Republican base, while trying not to give new fodder to the Democrats, who have sufficient matter in their hands: Iraq's instability, the Abramoff suit, and the eavesdropping controversy."

Alan Greenspan's departure elicits wide coverage. In Le Figaro Yves de Kerdrel asks: "Should we regret Greenspan?" His conclusion is "no," because Greenspan was too powerful, a "deus ex machina:" "Bernanke's task will be to convince the markets they are their own masters." In Le Monde an op-ed contends he will be much missed in Europe (See Part C), while Les Echos in its editorial notes that Greenspan had the ability "to give people the impression that he could control the situation. this degree of confidence relied entirely on the man not on the institution."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Hamas

"Hamas's Victory Causes a Shockwave"

Olivier Roy in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/31): "Hamas's victory illustrates the complexity of the Middle East's re-composition, which can be placed at the intersection of a

democratization process encouraged by the U.S. . and a front of `refusal' led by Tehran. Of course both processes cancel each other out. But the problem is that we tend to over simplify the Middle East into an opposition between democracy and `terrorism,' a vision which serves as the basis for Washington's policy. But the fact is that Al-Qaeda, Hamas and Iran are not expressions of the same violence. More than ever, the Sunni-Shiite opposition is guiding the Middle East: the Sunni Arabs are terrified of the Shiite progression. Once again the Middle East is at a new crossroads: the political integration of Islamic parties needs time, of which there is little. The Palestinians did not vote for Hamas in order to destroy Israel, but so that Hamas could take care of security, corruption, schools and water distribution. Meanwhile Hamas is under extreme pressure from Israel and the West to comply with short-term demands. The choices are few: from Palestine to Afghanistan to Iraq, stepping back is no longer an option. Stepping away from democratization will only increase regional instability and give Islamists a monopoly on the democratic process."

"The Irresistible Progression of Islamic Parties in the Arab-Muslim World."

Renaud Girard in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/31): "In the past two years, wherever democratic elections have been organized, Islamic parties have progressed spectacularly. Islamism, which aims to replace the law of men by the law of God, is not new. But we cannot escape from the obvious: in the Arab-Muslim world, the graft of European-style governance, made during colonization and based on a separation between the religious and the political, has been rejected by the people. The strength behind the Brotherhood's slogan, `Islam is the answer', is both simplistic and effective. For the poor, Islam is a liberating religion, which calls for submission to God, not men. This appeal is much stronger than the appeal of the western principle of equality, which is considered hypocritical. In addition, the image which the western world gives of itself to the Muslim masses is considerably tarnished. What social model can the West offer, when we are afraid to have children and abandon our elders to the care of strangers? It would be vain for the West to try and break this (Islamic) trend. It is important that we let the societies of the Arab-Muslim world experience their own governments of God. Meanwhile, we at home, should continue to demand democracy of men for all."

Afghanistan - London Donors' Conference

"Effectiveness at Stake"

Francois Chipaux in left-of-center Le Monde (01/31): "The reticence on the part of the donors can be explained by the level of corruption within the Afghan government. and the government's inability to effectively use the money that it has. The London Conference should provide an opportunity for the international community to rethink its action in a new context since today Afghanistan has a president and a parliament."

Greenspan's Departure

"A Star Takes a Bow"

Pierre-Antoine Delhommais in left-of-center Le Monde (01/31): "Greenspan's departure will be lamented the most in Europe. where he was a symbol of an enlightened central bank that was as attentive to the evolution of the indexes as he was to unemployment, inflation and monetary aggregates. For many reasons, the admiration that many have for Greenspan in Europe is surprising. First of all because economic growth in the U.S. developed at the expense of European growth and even if he is not directly involved. Greenspan approved Washington's weak dollar strategy. In Europe, Greenspan is exonerated from any responsibility in this strategy that is viewed as entirely the fault of the White House." STAPLETON